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**APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES PATENT**

**Title:           UNIVERSAL DISPENSING SYSTEM FOR AIR  
                  ASSISTED EXTRUSION OF LIQUID FILAMENTS**

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**SPECIFICATION**

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## **UNIVERSAL DISPENSING SYSTEM FOR AIR ASSISTED EXTRUSION OF LIQUID FILAMENTS**

### **Cross-Reference to Related Applications**

This application is related to the following co-pending and commonly-owned applications which were filed on even date herewith, namely U.S. Serial No. 29/138,931 (now U.S. Design Patent No.

- 5 D456,427 and U.S. Serial No. 29/138,963 (now U.S. Design Patent No. D457,538, the disclosures of which is hereby incorporated by reference herein in their entirety.

### **Field of the Invention**

- 10 The present invention generally relates to dispensing systems for applying a liquid material and, more particularly, for dispensing a filament or filaments of liquid, such as hot melt adhesive, on a substrate.

## **Background of the Invention**

Various liquid dispensing systems use air assisted extrusion nozzles to apply viscous material, such as thermoplastic material, onto a moving substrate. Often times, these systems are used to form nonwoven products. For example, meltblowing systems may be used during the manufacture of products such as diapers, feminine hygiene products and the like. In general, meltblowing systems include a source of liquid thermoplastic material, a source of pressurized process air, and a manifold for distributing the liquid material and process air. A plurality of modules or dispensing valves may be mounted to the manifold for receiving the liquid and process air and dispensing an elongated filament of the liquid material which is attenuated and drawn down by the air before being randomly applied onto the substrate. In general, a meltblowing die tip or nozzle includes a plurality of liquid discharge orifices arranged in a row and a slot on each side of the row of liquid discharge orifices for dispensing the air. Instead of slots, it is also well known to use two rows of air discharge orifices parallel to the row of liquid discharge orifices.

Controlled fiberization dispensing systems also use air assisted extrusion nozzles. However, the pressurized process air in these systems is used to swirl the extruded liquid filament. Conventional swirl nozzles or die tips typically have a central liquid discharge passage surrounded by a plurality of process air discharge passages. The liquid discharge passage is centrally located on a protrusion. A common configuration for the protrusion is conical or frustoconical with the liquid discharge passage

opening at the apex. The process air discharge passages are typically disposed at the base of the protrusion. The process air discharge passages are usually arranged in a radially symmetric pattern about the central liquid discharge passage. The process air discharge passages are directed in a  
5 generally tangential manner relative to the liquid discharge orifice and are all angled in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction around the central liquid discharge passage.

Another type of air assisted nozzle, referred to herein as a bi-radial nozzle, includes a wedge-shaped member having a pair of side  
10 surfaces converging to an apex. A liquid discharge passage extends along an axis through the wedge-shaped member and through the apex. The wedge-shaped member extends in a radially asymmetrical manner around the liquid discharge passage. Four process air discharge passages are positioned at the base of the wedge-shaped member. At least one process  
15 air discharge passage is positioned adjacent to each of the side surfaces and each of the process air discharge passages is angled in a compound manner generally toward the liquid discharge passage and offset from the axis of the liquid discharge passage.

These and other types of air-assisted extrusion nozzles  
20 generally require periodic maintenance due to accumulation of dust, hardened liquid material, or other reasons. Each dispensing valve may have to be unbolted from the manifold by unscrewing at least two bolts. The nozzle is then removed from the dispensing valve and another nozzle is mounted onto the valve. If necessary, the valve is reattached to the

manifold. Consequently, such repair can increase the required shut down time for removal and replacement of valves and nozzles. Removal of the entire dispensing valve with the attached nozzle is generally a requirement when changing between applications (e.g., meltblowing to controlled  
5 fiberization).

For these reasons, it is desirable to provide apparatus and methods for quickly changing nozzles on a die assembly without encountering various problems of prior liquid dispensing systems. It is also desirable to provide for easier maintenance and replacement of air-assisted  
10 extrusion nozzles.

### **Summary of the Invention**

Generally, the present invention provides an apparatus for dispensing a filament of liquid assisted by pressurized process air. The apparatus comprises a housing having a liquid supply passage, a process air  
15 supply passage, and a nozzle mounting surface which may be disposed within a recess of the housing. A nozzle includes an inlet side positioned adjacent the mounting surface and an outlet side having at least one liquid discharge orifice and a plurality of process air discharge passages adjacent the liquid discharge orifice. When properly mounted and aligned against the  
20 mounting surface, the liquid discharge orifice and the process air discharge air passages are respectively in fluid communication with the liquid supply passage and the process air supply passage of the housing. In one aspect of the invention, a nozzle ejecting lever is pivotally affixed to the housing

and pivotally moves from a first position to a second position. In the first position, the nozzle may be mounted adjacent the mounting surface as described above and, as the ejecting lever is moved to the second position, the nozzle is pried away from the mounting surface. This assists in  
5 removing nozzles which may be otherwise adhered to the housing due to thermoplastic liquid or other reasons.

In another aspect of the invention, a nozzle positioning lever is pivotally affixed to the housing to move between first and second positions. In the first position the positioning lever allows the nozzle to be mounted in  
10 a sealing manner within the housing recess and adjacent the mounting surface. In the second position the positioning lever holds the nozzle in the recess with the process air discharge passages in fluid communication with the process air supply passage and with the liquid discharge orifice in fluid communication with the liquid supply passage. In the preferred  
15 embodiment, the positioning lever and the ejecting lever may be one and the same with different portions of the lever performing the position and ejecting functions.

In another aspect of the invention, a clamping lever is pivotally affixed to the housing and operates in conjunction with cam surfaces on the  
20 nozzle and the housing to clamp the nozzle within the housing recess. In the preferred embodiment, the positioning lever is used to first position the nozzle within the recess and temporarily hold the nozzle within the recess. The clamping lever is then used to fixedly secure the nozzle within the recess for the duration of the dispensing operation. For nozzle replacement,

repair and other maintenance purposes, the clamping lever may be loosened and the positioning and ejecting lever may be used to pry the nozzle from the recess.

A plurality of nozzles are provided in a liquid dispensing system in accordance with the invention, with each nozzle configured to discharge a different filament pattern. For example, a first nozzle may be configured to dispense meltblown filaments while a second nozzle may be configured to dispense a swirl filament pattern. Each of the nozzles is constructed to be received in the recess such that the liquid discharge orifice or orifices of the nozzle and the process air discharge passages are respectively in fluid communication with the liquid supply passage and process air supply passage of the housing. Each nozzle is symmetrically configured such that the nozzle may be rotated 180° and still be mountable within the housing recess. In this regard, the nozzle includes cam surfaces on opposite sidewall portions thereof which can each interchangeably engage the cam surface of the clamping lever or a cam surface formed on a wall of the recess.

Various advantages, objectives, and features of the invention will become more readily apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art upon review of the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

### **Brief Description of the Drawings**

The accompanying drawings illustrate embodiments of the invention, together with a general description of the invention given above, and the detailed description of the embodiments given below, serve to  
5 explain the principles of the invention.

Fig. 1 is a cross-sectional view of a dispensing system configured to hold different types of air assisted extrusion nozzles in accordance with the principles of the present invention for dispensing liquid filaments;

10 Fig. 1A is an enlarged cross-sectional view of a lower portion of the dispensing valve shown in Fig. 1, illustrating a nozzle assembly;

Fig. 2 is a partially disassembled view of the dispensing valve including the nozzle shown in Fig. 1;

15 Fig. 3 is perspective side view of the lower portion of the dispensing valve shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 4A is a cross-sectional view of the lower portion of the dispensing valve shown in Fig. 1, illustrating insertion of a nozzle, assisted by the positioning and ejecting lever;

20 Fig. 4B is a cross-sectional view of the lower portion of the dispensing valve shown in Fig. 1, illustrating the nozzle being frictionally held by the positioning and ejecting lever;

Fig. 4C is a cross-sectional view of the lower portion of the dispensing valve shown in Fig. 1, illustrating ejection of the nozzle, assisted by the positioning and ejecting lever;



Fig. 5 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of a meltblowing nozzle constructed according to the invention;

Fig. 6 is a cut-away elevated perspective view of a controlled fiberization nozzle constructed according to the invention;

5                    Fig. 7 is a bottom perspective view of the controlled fiberization nozzle of Fig. 6;

Fig. 8 is a top view of the nozzle of Figs. 6 and 7;

Fig. 9 is a bottom perspective view of the meltblowing nozzle of Fig. 5;

10                  Fig. 10 is a top view of the meltblowing nozzle of Figs. 5 and 9;

Fig. 11 is a bottom perspective view of a bi-radial nozzle constructed according to the invention; and

Fig. 12 is a top view of the bi-radial nozzle of Fig. 11.

15        **Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments**

For purposes of this description, words of direction such as "upward", "vertical", "horizontal", "right", "left" and the like are applied in conjunction with the drawings for purposes of clarity. As is well known, liquid dispensing devices may be oriented in substantially any orientation, so  
20        these directional words should not be used to imply any particular absolute directions for an apparatus consistent with the invention.

For purposes of simplifying the description of the present invention, the illustrative embodiment will hereinafter be described in

relation to certain types of nozzles for distribution of thermoplastic liquid such as hot melt thermoplastic adhesives, but those of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate application of the present invention to dispensing of other materials and use other types of nozzles.

5                   With reference to the figures, and to Figs. 1 and 1A in particular, a liquid dispensing system 10 for air assisted extrusion of liquid filaments is depicted as including a dispensing valve 12 and a manifold 14. It will be appreciated that one or more of the die modules 12 may be mounted in side-by-side relationship to the manifold 14 that distributes  
10 liquid material and pressurized air to each of the die modules 12. Each dispensing valve 12 includes a pneumatic valve mechanism 16 in a housing 18. The pneumatic valve mechanism 16 is in fluid communication with the manifold 14 to receive the liquid material and to a liquid material flow passage 20 in the housing 18. The valve may alternatively be electrically  
15 actuated for controlling flow of the liquid material through the dispensing valve 12. A detailed description of the pneumatic valve mechanism 16 is provided in U.S. Patent No. 6,056,155, entitled "Liquid Dispensing Device" and assigned to Nordson Corporation, the assignee of this invention. The disclosure of U.S. Patent No. 6,056,155 is hereby incorporated herein by  
20 reference in its entirety.

                  The housing 18 includes an air supply passage 22 adapted to receive the pressurized air from the manifold 14 and two air flow passages 24, 26 that are parallel to and on each side of the liquid material flow passage 20. The pair of air flow passages 24, 26 allows mounting of

different types of nozzles, but does result in different air flow path distances from the air supply passage 22. Thus, an annular air chamber 28 in the housing 18 is in fluid communication with both the air supply passage 22 and the air flow passages 24, 26 for balancing air flow. The

5 different types of nozzles 32a, 32b, 32c benefit from the even distribution of air flow. In the illustrative embodiments, these different types of nozzles 32a, 32b, 32c include meltblowing, controlled fiberization (hereinafter "swirl") and nozzles currently manufactured and sold under the trademark SUMMIT™ by Nordson Corporation, the assignee of the present invention.

10 The SUMMIT™ nozzles are hereinafter referred to as bi-radial nozzles.

Portions of the dispensing valve 12 form a nozzle assembly 30 for selectively and expeditiously mounting various types of air assisted extrusion nozzles 32a to the housing 18. In particular, the nozzle assembly 30 includes a clamping structure that allows access for removing and

15 installing a nozzle 32a to the dispensing valve 12 from the front side opposite the manifold 14. The nozzle 32a is frictionally held in contact with a nozzle mounting surface 36 by the opposition of a fixed member or wall 38 of the housing 18 and a positioning lever 40, which creates a positioning and temporary clamping force parallel to the nozzle mounting

20 surface 36. The temporary support avoids prolonged manual holding of the nozzle 32a, which beneficially reduces the amount of time that a user must be in contact with the typically hot surface of the dispensing valve 12 as well as making installation more convenient. This frictional force from the positioning lever 40 advantageously supports the nozzle 32a while a

pivoting clamping lever 42 locks the nozzle 32a to the nozzle mounting surface 36. In particular, a socket head cap screw 44, is threaded inward against housing 18, outwardly pivoting an upper portion 46 of the clamping lever 42 about a pivot pin 48, thereby pivoting a lower portion 50 of the clamping lever 42 under the nozzle 32a. Specifically, a cam surface 52 of the lower portion 50 makes inward and upward contact to a forward cam surface 54 of the nozzle 32a, with a rearward cam surface 56 of the nozzle 32a similarly supported by a cam surface 58 of the fixed member or wall 38.

As will be described in further detail below, different types of air assisted extrusion nozzles 32a, 32b, 32c may be selected for mounting to the nozzle assembly 30. The air inputs 60, 62 and liquid input 64 of each nozzle 32a, 32b, 32c are registered to be in liquid communication respectively with the liquid material flow passage 20 and air flow passages 24, 26 of the housing 18. Pressurized process air flow is diffused by one or more air troughs 66 that provide a tortuous air flow path through nozzle 32a and slow down the air flow velocity exiting process air discharge passages 68.

With reference to Fig. 2, the dispensing valve 12 is shown with the nozzle 32a and nozzle assembly 30 disassembled to illustrate additional features. The positioning lever 40 and clamping lever 42 are pivotally affixed to the housing 18 with the same pivot pin 48. The positioning lever 40 resides within a slot 72 in the clamping lever 42 that allows the positioning lever 40 to pivot upward to an ejection position when

the pivoting lever is in an unlocked or loosened state. The cap screw 44 is retained within a threaded hole 74 in the clamping lever 42 by a snap ring 76. An upper surface 78 of the nozzle 32a includes a symmetric pattern of air inlets 60, 62 and liquid inlet 64 so that the nozzle 32a may be inserted  
5 in one of two orientations with one being 180 degrees rotated from the other. The upper surface 78 also includes symmetrically placed alignment recesses 86, 88 registered to receive an alignment pin 90 affixed to the nozzle mounting surface 36 (shown in Figs. 1 and 1A), that assist in positioning the upper surface 78 relative to the nozzle mounting surface 36.

10                   With reference to Fig. 3, the nozzle assembly 30 is shown with a bi-radial nozzle 32a mounted, as one type of air assisted extrusion. A detailed description of the bi-radial nozzle 32a is disclosed in co-pending U.S. Serial No. 09/571,703, entitled "Module And Nozzle For Dispensing Controlled Patterns Of Liquid Material" and assigned to the common  
15 assignee, the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. Shown in phantom, a meltblowing nozzle 32b and a swirl nozzle 32c are shaped similarly to the bi-radial nozzle 32a to be alternatively received in a recess 91 of the housing 18.

20                   With reference to Figs. 4A-4C, use of the positioning lever 40 to assist in mounting and ejecting a nozzle 32a is illustrated with the clamping lever 42 adjusted to the unlocked position by outwardly adjusting the cap screw 44. Thus, with reference to Fig. 4A, the cam surface 52 of the clamping lever 42 does not impede an uninstalled nozzle 32a moved upward into proximity to the nozzle mounting surface 36, as depicted by

the phantom lines. The rearward alignment recess 86 in the nozzle has sufficient dimensions to register to the alignment pin 90 with the nozzle shifted slightly forward to clear the fixed member or wall 38 which provides a rear boundary for recess 91. If the positioning lever 40 is in the ejection position, further upward movement of the nozzle 32a will bear upon a projection 92 of the positioning lever 40, pivoting the positioning lever 40 to an engaged position depicted in Fig. 4B. In particular, a cam surface 40a is brought into frictional contact with the forward surface 41 of the nozzle 32a. This urges the rearward cam surface 56 into engagement with cam surface 58 of the fixed member or wall 38 thereby forcing nozzle 32a against the nozzle mounting surface 36. This temporarily aligns and clamps nozzle 32a within recess 91. At this point, the clamping lever 42 may be moved to the locked position by tightening fastener 44 (shown best in Fig. 1A) for the period of use of the dispensing valve 12. This urges cam surface 52 against cam surface 54 thereby urging nozzle 32a upwardly into a clamped, sealing engagement against mounting surface 36.

With reference to Fig. 4C, when the nozzle 32a requires repair or replacement with another nozzle, the clamping lever 42 is moved to the unlocked position as depicted. Then the positioning lever 40 is used as an ejection lever and is pivoted upward toward the ejection position. As the positioning lever 40 pivots upward, the projection 92 bears downward upon an upper cam surface 55 of the nozzle 32a for ejecting the nozzle 32a. A prying force thus applied by the positioning lever 40 on the nozzle 32a overcomes adhesion of accumulated liquid material during use.

Figs. 5-12 illustrate the three illustrative types of air assisted extrusion nozzles 32a, 32b, 32c adapted for being universally mounted to the dispensing valve 12.

With reference to Figs. 6-8, the controlled fiberization nozzle 32c has a circular air trough 94 that encompasses a central liquid input 96. Each of the air jets 98 receives pressurized air from the two air flow passages 24, 26 of the housing 18 after being diffused and slowed down in the circular air trough 94 so that none of the air jets 98 directly receives the pressurized air. Consequently, the air flow is more uniform for all air jets 98, as arrayed about a liquid orifice 100 that receives liquid material from the central liquid input 96.

With reference to Figs. 5, 9 and 10, the meltblowing nozzle 32b depicted in Fig. 2 is shown having a row of orifices 102 flanked by rows of air jets 104. Balancing the air flow to these air jets 104 and providing consistent liquid flow to the orifices 102 is provided as shown in Fig. 10. The upper surface 78 of the nozzle 32b includes a central elongate slot 106 for communicating the liquid material from the liquid material flow passage 20 of the housing 18 to the length of the row of orifices 102. Two elongate air troughs 108, 110 diffuse and slow down the air flow from each air flow passage 24, 26 respectively to the rows of air jets 104.

Similarly, with reference to Figs. 11 and 12, the bi-radial nozzle 32a includes an elongate central slot 112 for providing liquid material to a row of orifices 70 and two elongate air troughs 66 to diffuse and slow down the air flow from each air flow passage 24, 26 respectively to the

rows of air jets 68 nonradially positioned about the orifices 70.

By virtue of the foregoing, and in addition to other advantages a nozzle assembly 30 for a dispensing valve 12 of a liquid dispensing system 10 is readily reconfigurable for various types of air assisted  
5 extrusion nozzles 32a, 32b, 32c without having to disassemble the dispensing valve 12 from the manifold 14 or having to remove multiple fasteners.

While the present invention has been illustrated by a description of various preferred embodiments and while these embodiments  
10 has been described in some detail, it is not the intention of the Applicant to restrict or in any way limit the scope of the appended claims to such detail. Additional advantages and modifications will readily appear to those skilled in the art. The various features of the invention may be used alone or in numerous combinations depending on the needs and preferences of the  
15 user. This has been a description of the present invention, along with the preferred methods of practicing the present invention as currently known. However, the invention itself should only be defined by the appended claims, wherein we claim: